

A's News Clips, Monday November 28, 2011

A's hire former Giants outfielder Chili Davis as hitting coach

By Carl Steward, Oakland Tribune

The A's completed their 2012 coaching staff with the hiring of former switch-hitting Giants outfielder Chili Davis as their hitting coach Saturday.

It will be the first major league coaching job for Davis, who played 19 seasons with five major league teams, including his first seven with the Giants from 1981-87.

But according to Davis, he has been on the radar of A's general manager Billy Beane and manager Bob Melvin for a while. He said Beane contacted him as long as five years ago about possibly working for Oakland and that Melvin was interested in employing him in his two prior managerial stints. Melvin and Davis were teammates with the Giants in 1986-87.

"I know (Melvin's) tried to hire me twice, once with the Seattle Mariners, which was a job I was looking forward to at that time but didn't get it, and then again with the Arizona Diamondbacks," he said. "So I guess the third time's the charm. It all comes back around to two people who I know really wanted me with them and the opportunity finally came. To me, it's perfect timing right now."

Davis, 51, said he is excited about returning to the Bay Area, and he isn't coming in as a novice. In 2011, he was the hitting coach for Boston's Triple-A affiliate in Pawtucket, R.I., and he was an instructional league hitting coach for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2010. He also was a hitting instructor for the Australian national baseball team for three years.

Davis had a career average of .274 with 350 home runs and 1,372 RBIs, was a three-time All-Star and won World Series titles with the 1991 Minnesota Twins and 1998-99 New York Yankees.

His home run total is fifth among switch hitters behind Mickey Mantle, Eddie Murray, Chipper Jones and Lance Berkman, and until last year, he shared a record with Murray for most games homering from both sides of the plate (11). The Yankees' Mark Teixeira broke the mark last season.

While mostly unfamiliar with A's personnel, Davis said he will bring a wealth of expertise to the predominantly young roster, particularly switch hitters Jemile Weeks and Cliff Pennington.

"Being a switch hitter and understanding the mentality of what we go through, there's something a little different," he said. "When you're two different hitters at any given time during the course of a ballgame, unless you've done it, I don't think you really understand it."

Davis lives in the Phoenix area and hopes to make contact with as many A's position players as possible before spring training starts.

"I'd like to see and learn as much as I can about the guys I'm going to be working with this year," he said. "It'll be good to get to know some guys prior to spring training. I know there are probably a few of them who live here in Arizona where I am, and if I can just get together with them, it'll start the process earlier."

Last season under hitting coach Gerald Perry, the A's were 12th in the American League in batting average, on-base percentage and slugging percentage.

A's

Davis as coach is switch for hitters

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

Chili Davis is among the top switch-hitters of all time. Now, he's the A's hitting coach, and he'll get to work with Oakland's most exciting young player, switch-hitting leadoff hitter Jemile Weeks.

"Switch-hitters on the team are going to benefit," Davis said Saturday, adding later, "I understand what it takes as a switch-hitter, the work you have to put in. I think these guys will be more open to what I have to say, knowing I'm not guessing."

Weeks, shortstop Cliff Pennington and catcher Landon Powell bat from both sides, and Weeks said Saturday that he's looking forward to getting instruction from someone with experience switch hitting.

"It's a positive thing," Weeks said by phone from his home in Florida. "You don't usually get that with a hitting coach. ... He can teach from both sides. That's great."

Davis' 350 career homers place him fifth among switch-hitters after Mickey Mantle, Eddie Murray, Chipper Jones and Lance Berkman. He began his big-league career with the Giants in 1981, and he said that he is looking forward to returning to the Bay Area.

"It definitely couldn't happen in a better place or better area," Davis said. "I have ties there, I love the Bay Area, I spent a lot of time in the Bay Area, I started my career there. It's a huge part of the excitement for me. To get to spend more time there again makes it more special."

Davis was a teammate of A's manager Bob Melvin for two seasons with the Giants, and the two have remained friends. Davis, 51, said that he'd had discussions about working on Melvin's staff's before, once in Seattle and once in Arizona, and that he's happy to finally get a chance to do so. He replaces Gerald Perry, whose contract was not renewed.

Davis was Boston's Triple-A hitting coach last season and was a hitting instructor for the Dodgers the year before. He also has worked at an academy for elite players in Australia and with the Australian Olympic team.

Drumbeat: New A's hitting coach Chili Davis is a plus for Jemile Weeks

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser 11/26/2011 1:05pm

Chili Davis was announced as the A's new hitting coach today, as expected, and on a conference call, he said he believes the team's switch hitters will benefit from his hiring. Davis was a switch hitter during a very solid major-league career - he hit 350 homers, fifth most all time among switch hitters - and he said that when switch hitters work with him, they'll know he's not guessing, he knows what he's talking about.

"That's positive thing," A's leadoff hitter Jemile Weeks told me by phone from his offseason home in Florida. "You don't usually get that with a hitting coach, or even many other players. He can teach from both sides, that's great."

Weeks, who might be the A's most important player in the wake of the expected free-agent departures of four members of the starting lineup (the entire outfield and Hideki Matsui), is a switch hitter, and a young one at that, with not even a full year of big-league experience. Shortstop Cliff Pennington is also a switch hitter, and so is backup catcher Landon Powell. Davis said he admired and emulated two of the great switch hitters of his day, Eddie Murray and Reggie Smith, and Smith even helped talk Davis out of giving up hitting from both sides.

Davis, 51, is excited to come back to the Bay Area, where he began his career with the Giants.

"It definitely couldn't happen in a better place or better area," Davis said. "I have ties there, I love the Bay Area, I spent a lot of time in the Bay Area, I started my career there. It's a huge part of the excitement for me. To get to spend more time there again makes it more special."

Davis played with A's manager Bob Melvin for two seasons and they have remained friends, occasionally mountain biking and golfing in the Phoenix area. Davis twice has had talks about joining Melvin's staffs elsewhere, once in Seattle and once in Arizona, and he enjoys the thought of finally working with him. "I feel very comfortable with the guy running the show," Davis said.

Davis was Boston's Triple-A hitting coach last year at Pawtucket, and he worked as a hitting instructor for the Dodgers the year before. He also has traveled to Australia to work with a national camp for elite players, as well as working with the Australian Olympic team.

A's hire Chili Davis to be hitting coach

Former slugger ranks among Majors' all-time leading switch-hitters

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- Former Giants teammates and longtime friends Bob Melvin and Chili Davis were always in favor of a reunion.

They tried to create a professional one first in Seattle, then Arizona, but the timing was never right. It is now.

Melvin, the A's manager, handpicked Davis to be his hitting coach in Oakland, a decision that was announced by Oakland on Saturday, completing the club's staff for the 2012 season.

Melvin hoped for such a scenario when standing at the helm of the Mariners (2003-04) and D-backs (05-09), but, "I guess the third time's the charm," Davis said on a conference call Saturday morning.

Davis, who will be 52 in January, served as the hitting coach for Boston's Triple-A Pawtucket affiliate this year, marking his first full season of coaching. The former outfielder and designated hitter previously worked as a part-time hitting coach for the Dodgers' instructional league team and the Australian National Team in 2003-04.

The three-time All-Star slugger played 19 seasons, batting .274 with 350 home runs, 1,372 RBIs, 1,240 runs scored and a .451 slugging percentage in 2,436 games with the Giants, Angels, Twins, Royals and Yankees. He ranks fifth in homers, sixth in RBIs and eighth in walks among switch-hitters in Major League history.

Perhaps no other resume, then, is better suited for an A's team that employs switch-hitters Jemile Weeks and Cliff Pennington.

"Any switch-hitters are going to benefit," Davis said.

However, he ensures his philosophies will extend to the entire lineup. He's a preacher of a multitude of things, including quality at-bats, a trust in instincts, the creation of good mechanical habits, awareness of the game and the understanding of pitchers.

"It's about being a competitor in each at-bat," Davis said. "You're forcing pitchers to work -- being offensive. Trying to get your philosophies across to players is to understand the players and their comfort zone and to try to work from there with them. There's no one way to go about it with so many guys, and I think the biggest thing I learned in the last two years when you're dealing with professional hitters, that one of the most important things is for them to see that you really care and you're consistent with the things that you say to them, that you are really paying attention."

Davis replaces Gerald Perry, whose contract was not renewed, and joins bench coach Chip Hale, pitching coach Curt Young, first-base coach Tye Waller, third-base coach Mike Gallego and bullpen coach Rick Rodriguez on Melvin's staff. Melvin and Davis were teammates in 1986-87.

"This couldn't happen at a better place in a better area," Davis said. "I've always loved the Bay Area. I started my career there, and I think part of the huge excitement for me is that I am in the Bay Area and I get to spend time there again. I think it makes this even more special, being back there."

In the meantime, Davis plans on grabbing hold of the A's roster and collecting a few addresses and phone numbers in an effort to learn about his new players before the start of camp.

The task ahead won't be simple. Oakland's .244 batting average was tied for 23rd in the Majors -- 12th in the American League -- in 2011, and the club's .680 OPS ranked ahead of only the Pirates, Giants, Twins, Padres and Mariners. Moreover, the A's will likely be without the likes of free agents Josh Willingham and Coco Crisp in 2012, electing instead to field a rather young team.

"The desire to teach has always been there," he said. "I love the interaction with players, and I love the game -- watching the game, talking about the game, anything."

Chili Davis becomes A's hitting coach under Melvin

Janie McCauley, AP Baseball Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. -- Bob Melvin and Chili Davis have remained close friends since their days as teammates with the San Francisco Giants as young major leaguers.

Twice before, Melvin had expressed interest in hiring Davis as his hitting coach - in Seattle and again with the Arizona Diamondbacks. They have golfed together and gone mountain biking.

Davis is on Melvin's staff at last, hired Saturday as Oakland's hitting coach to complete the Athletics' staff heading into 2012.

"I do understand this is a business. Bobby and I have been friends for a very long time," Davis said from his home in the Phoenix area. "I feel very comfortable having him as the guy that's running the show on the field for us. It's good to know you're working for someone you're familiar with, who's a friend and he has your back and you have his back also."

Melvin took over for the fired Bob Geren in June and went 35-35 after the All-Star break and 47-52 overall while dealing with key injuries to the starting rotation. He received a three-year deal late in the season to continue as the club's manager. The A's (74-88) went a fifth straight year without a winning record or playoff berth since being swept in the 2006 AL championship series by Detroit.

Davis plans to get to work right away making contact with players, meeting in person with those who are already in Arizona.

Oakland has a pair of switch-hitting starters, Jemile Weeks and Cliff Pennington, who stand to learn plenty from Davis.

"The biggest thing I've learned the last two years is the most important thing they look for is that you really care and you're going to be consistent with what you say to them and that you really are paying attention," Davis said.

Davis spent the first seven of his 19 major league seasons with the Giants, who selected the Jamaica native in the 11th round of the 1977 draft. Returning to the Bay Area to work under Melvin was appealing.

"I know he's tried to hire me twice, once with the Seattle Mariners - a job I was looking forward to getting and didn't get it - and then with the Arizona Diamondbacks. I guess the third time's the charm," Davis said. "This couldn't have happened at a better place and a better area. I have ties there. I have always loved the Bay Area. I spent a lot of time in the Bay Area. I started my career there. That's a huge part of the excitement for me."

Davis, one of baseball's most accomplished switch hitters, was a three-time All-Star and won three World Series titles while also playing for the Angels, Twins, Royals and New York Yankees.

He is a career .274 hitter with 350 home runs, 1,372 RBIs and a .451 slugging percentage in 2,436 games.

Davis replaces Gerald Perry, whose contract wasn't renewed.

A's move

Major League Baseball appears to be nearing verdict on A's move to San Jose

San Francisco Business Times, November 22, 2011, 7:09am PST

The Mercury News looks at the progress of the Oakland A's planned relocation to San Jose, a move that requires the consent of **Major League Baseball**.

The report says the team's future should be known before spring training begins.

Among the recent progress, Major League Baseball commissioner Bud Selig met with A's executives on the San Jose ballpark plan. The A's were asked to increase seating at the ballpark from 32,000 to 36,000.

Selig has also scheduled a meeting with the **San Francisco Giants** to discuss the Giants' dispute with the A's over territorial rights.

Report: Chili Davis to be A's hitting coach

Former slugger coached this past season in Red Sox system

By Adam Berry / MLB.com

The A's have hired Chili Davis to be their new hitting coach, according to a report by Comcast SportsNet New England.

Davis, 52, served as the hitting coach for Boston's Triple-A Pawtucket affiliate in 2011, his first full season of coaching. The former outfielder and designated hitter previously worked as the hitting coach for the Dodgers' instructional league team.

Neither the A's nor the Red Sox have commented on or confirmed the report.

The switch-hitter played 19 years in the Majors, batting .274 with 350 homers during his time with the Giants, Angels, Twins, Yankees and Royals. He won three World Series rings, one with the Twins (1991) and two with the Yankees (1998, 1999).

Davis is a former teammate of A's manager Bob Melvin, as both played for the Giants in 1986 and '87. He will replace Gerald Perry, who was not retained by the A's. Davis also succeeded Perry as Pawtucket's hitting coach before the 2011 season.

Oakland's .244 batting average was tied for 23rd in the Majors -- 12th in the American League -- in 2011, and the club's .680 OPS ranked ahead of only the Pirates, Giants, Twins, Padres and Mariners.

THANKFUL HE CAN HELP

BRADEN HOPES HIS CONTRIBUTION HELPS DINING HALL EFFORT GROW

By Bob Highfill, Stockton Record, 11/24/2011

STOCKTON - Fane Davis doesn't really know who Dallas Braden is.

She and her children visit the St. Mary's Interfaith Dining Hall every day. Their lives don't allow for many diversions.

"I know he's some sort of sports person," said Davis, 38, who was with her children, 9-year-old Quanma Hillard and 8-year-old Deandrea Hillard.

Then, in a respectful tone she said: "We're here every day, so it doesn't matter who's here. We're here every day."

Braden doesn't mind. He hasn't helped feed those in need on Thanksgiving eve the past four years for notoriety or publicity. The 28-year-old Stagg High graduate and Oakland Athletics pitcher, who on May 9, 2010, threw the 19th perfect game in major league history, does what he can because he can. He grew out of humbling beginnings and because he's earned some success, he feels compelled to help those who are less fortunate.

Again, with an outpouring of support from the community, Braden was able to provide more than 600 hot meals to men, women and children in need of a helping hand on Wednesday.

Braden said he had to turn away local merchants and restaurants who wanted to help because he had more than enough food for the lunch crowd. He hopes his efforts bring year-round attention to the growing need for services in this area, which has had many sectors decimated by the economy.

"It's just fun," Braden said. "It brings us together, too. I'm thankful for the opportunity and ability to do this."

Braden and his grandmother, Peggy Lindsey, have solicited and accepted donations the past several weeks. They hauled a bounty to the dining hall on Wednesday that included 60 pizzas from Michael's Pizza, 800 pounds of riblets and 15 turkeys from Bottley's BBQ, 20 turkeys from Andy Prokop with the United Way of San Joaquin, eight trays each of chile Colorado and chile verde from Casa Flores, 35 trays of lasagna from the Pizza Factory, 30 trays each of stuffing and mashed potatoes from Whirlow's, and 30 plaques of Arizona brand iced tea from Gaine's Liquors. Braden matched all of the donations.

"What I like about the whole thing is we have food from all over," Braden said. "The whole idea is why not give them, especially the kids, some choices one day a year. They can have all they want. That's the idea for me."

Edward Figueroa, chief executive officer of St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services, which also provides clothing, shelter and education, said he sees more and more families and single mothers with children at the facility. St. Mary's is on pace to serve 400,000 meals this year.

"We have a lot of individuals in dire financial hardship," Figueroa said. "We're happy to provide some of life's basic necessities to those in need."

Low Back, a 54-year-old construction and maintenance worker, was wearing a nice pair of used dress shoes he picked up on Wednesday at the St. Mary's campus. Back hadn't heard of Braden, either, but he was grateful the Stockton resident helped provide his lunch.

"I'm thankful I'm here and that I have my health," Back said. "There are a lot more people in need than there used to be."

Contact sports editor Bob Highfill at (209) 546-8282 or bhighfill@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/sportsblog.

Give Back challenge

St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services is asking all of its volunteers and anyone who wants to help to take part in a new event on May 19, the Give Back Challenge, to provide service projects on the St. Mary's campus. Information: (209) 467-0703.

Press Box View: Mack left his mark on baseball history

Craig Swalboski, Post Bulletin, Rochester, MN, 11/25/2011

Recent news item: Tony La Russa retires as the third winningest manager in Major League Baseball history behind only John McGraw (2,763) and the all-time leader Connie Mack (3,731).

Another recent news item: Joe Paterno is fired in his 46th season as head coach. His 62 seasons on the coaching staff of the same team is a record for American major colleges and pro sports, ahead of the 50 years served by Connie Mack.

Which made me think: Let's take a closer look at Connie Mack.

First of all, Mack didn't set the career wins record simply by hanging around so long, which admittedly he could do because he owned the Philadelphia Athletics. He built and then managed some great teams. His five World Series championships are still the most by any one manager, and he's still the only one to win back-to-back titles twice.

His legacy was dimmed by a stretch of last-place finishes 11 out of 12 seasons from 1935-46. The A's had winning records from 1947-49 but dropped back to last place in 1950, prompting Mack to step down after that season, at the age of 88.

Eighty-eight!

Mack came up as a left-handed-throwing catcher in the early era of baseball, starting his managing career in 1894 with the Pittsburgh Pirates. After three years with them, he retired as a full-time player and took on a role as manager and backup catcher — and 25 percent owner — for the minor league Milwaukee Brewers. Four years later he became manager, treasurer and part owner of the Philadelphia A's.

The team reached the World Series in his second year and again in his fifth, losing both times. But they won four A.L. pennants from 1910-14 and won the Series three of the four times.

That team had to be dispersed due to financial difficulties, a recurring pattern through Mack's reign and one that gave him a reputation with some fans as being cheap. Biographer Norman Macht concludes that Mack plowed nearly all of his profits back into the team and sometimes had to react to financial circumstances.

His third great team was built in the late 1920s — for a time including both a veteran Ty Cobb and rookie Jimmie Foxx — and won the 1929 and 1930 World Series.

He favored the “big inning” approach rather than “small ball,” even during the “dead ball” era (his first 18 seasons) when home runs were far less frequent than from 1919 on. In general, he believed in getting the best players possible — favoring those who were self-motivated and self-disciplined and had intelligence and “baseball smarts” — while downplaying the prevailing school of thought that managing tactics were primary to a team’s success. He traded away the talented “Shoeless Joe” Jackson because of what he thought were Jackson’s bad attitude and unintelligent play.

Mack’s managerial innovations included repositioning of outfielders via signals from the dugout.

Personally, he was, as his friend and famed sports writer Red Smith described him, “tough and warm and wonderful, kind and stubborn and courtly and unreasonable and generous and calculating and naïve and gentle and proud and humorous and demanding and unpredictable.”

Players liked him; he was an easygoing manager who did not utilize curfews and bed checks.

His resume after 37 seasons was sufficient to get him voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame’s second group of inductees, in 1937, making one of the first 13 so honored.

Sadly, only four years after Connie’s retirement, the family sold the team to a businessman who moved the A’s to Kansas City for the 1955 season.

Cornelius McGillicuddy — his real name, which he never had legally changed — died early in 1956 at the age of 93.

MLB ensured he would be the last of his kind in two ways. First, they prohibited managers from having any financial ownership stake in a team.

Second, they required managers to wear a uniform while performing their tasks in the dugout or on the field. Mack wore a business suit in the dugout his entire career.

Mack’s name and legacy of achievement carried on with his grandson Connie Mack III who served in Congress by representing Florida for 18 years and his great grandson Connie Mack IV, who currently serves in the U.S. House and is the likely Republican Senate nominee in Florida in 2012.

Not bad for a man who had to drop out of school after the eighth grade to support his family.

Commentary: The collector and Connie Mack
Reno man's memorabilia quest lands rarities from old Philadelphia A's

Written by Dan Hinxman, Reno Gazette Journal 11/24/2011

If your name is Cornelius McGillicuddy, and people think your signature is worth possessing, you become very grateful for the decision you made about your name early in life, not long after the end of the Civil War.

There surely are players in history who meant more to baseball than did Connie Mack, but you'd be hard-pressed to find someone whose overall contributions meant more to the game.

He wasn't an especially memorable player -- 11 seasons as a catcher with a career .245 average -- but he went on to manage for 53 seasons and own the Philadelphia-then-Kansas City Athletics for more than half a century.

No one has come close to managing as many games as he did (7,755). His wins total as a manager, 3,751, is almost 1,000 victories more than any other manager. His dual roles overlapped twice, as player-manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates (1894-96) and as manager-owner of the A's (1901-1950).

Rob Rodriguez knew none of this when, in 1965, he and some friends went to a drug store that was closing on the corner of Kietzke and Vassar. Rodriguez was 8 and he and his buddies thought if they helped the owner pack things up maybe they'd get some candy or toys out of it.

The owner gave him two boxes of Bazooka bubble gum that were two years old. Rodriguez's mom wouldn't let him eat the gum, which turned out to be a blessing. Because in those two boxes were 48 individual boxes, each with 1963 baseball cards in them -- players like Willie Mays, Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, Ernie Banks and Roberto Clemente.

Born was a passion that has turned into a profession for Rodriguez, now 54. He and his family own thousands of sports collectibles, almost all baseball. His Northwest Reno home is a shrine to the remarkable history of the game.

And recently he added some history that has gotten the attention of the Baseball Hall of Fame, HBO and author Norman Macht, who recently completed the first of a trilogy on Mack. (Rodriguez sent his cache to Macht in Texas this summer, and Macht plans to include it in the third installment and acknowledge Rodriguez for his contributions. Macht has already sent Rodriguez a signed copy of the first book.)

Rodriguez spent \$5,000 on two A's accounting ledgers, a checkbook and 15 canisters of 16-millimeter film. Writing that check was easy, though. Rodriguez once spent \$110,000 on a signed Christy Mathewson ball, which he sold a couple of years later for \$130,000.

The films -- Rodriguez has viewed about half of the 7,000 feet of them -- date from the 1930s to the 1960s and include images of Mack.

The checkbook contains hundreds of blank checks and dozens that are pre-signed by Earle Mack, Connie's son, who took over ownership along with his brother, Roy, in the early 1950s.

The two nearly 1-foot-thick ledgers contain the entries of day-to-day business. Rodriguez hasn't had the entries authenticated yet, but he believes they are in Connie Mack's handwriting.

"Here's an entry for Jimmie Foxx in 1929," Rodriguez said of the A's first baseman and Hall of Famer who became the second player behind Babe Ruth to eclipse the 500 home run mark. "'Sent him contract calling for \$7,500. Told him he could bring his wife to training camp as a wedding present.' It's signed Feb. 3, 1929."

Rodriguez has viewed Mack's handwriting and said the "C"s in the ledgers are similar to the "C" in Mack's signature. He said he believes the entire find is worth at least \$30,000, perhaps as much as \$75,000 if the writing in the ledgers is indeed from Mack.

And today there are two men in the Bay Area who are probably kicking themselves.

The treasure trove was tossed into a Dumpster not long after the Kansas City A's moved to Oakland in 1968. An employee fished them out and held onto them. About a year ago, he sold the entire lot for \$200 at a flea market. And the man who sold it to Rodriguez through eBay also apparently had no idea as to the true value.

"He had no clue," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez said he's not sure what he wants to do with it all. Collectors buy low and sell high, but he said he'd have a tough time parting with this.

"After talking to the family, we're thinking of donating it to the Hall of Fame, at least for a period of time," he said. "I'd hate to part with it. It's just one of those things. (If I sell it) I'm never going to see it again."

Oh, and by the way, the 48 boxes of Bazooka bubble gum? Still unopened.

Revel in Scott Ostler's cornball holiday prose

Scott Ostler, San Francisco Chronicle 11/24/2011

What I'm thankful for ...

-- My Hall of Fame induction. That's right, I've been enshrined in the Cornball HOF for writing a what-I'm-thankful-for-on-Thanksgiving column. Hey, would you rather read 800 words on Jim Harbaugh's other brother? I rest my case.

-- For Joe Paterno, because he and all the other folks back in JoePaLand have set the sleaze bar so high that we'll never again have to become righteously-indignant when a college program is busted for hookers on yachts with free tattoos.

-- For an end, we hope, to the alleged Penn State-related crime spree, a beginning of the punishment process for all who have it coming, and some justice for the victims.

-- For the A's filling up their ballpark again, even if it's only on the silver screen.

-- For the NBA lockout. In these challenging financial times, the team owners and players have saved hoops fans hundreds of millions of dollars - money not spent on tickets and overpriced jerseys.

The longer the lockout, the greater the chance that even the cash-bloated owners will start to feel the squeeze. Maybe they're feeling it already. I hear one owner was seen in a Prius stretch limo.

-- That the Giants didn't repeat as World Series champs. Team insiders say it wasn't just Aubrey Huff but several Giants who celebrated too long into last offseason. Imagine the partying had they won it again. They'd be lucky to field a team by next Opening Day.

-- That the A's are being given extended revenue-sharing privileges beyond 2016, due to their unstable ballpark situation. This will buy another decade or two for Bud Selig to go to the whip and demand a report from his blue-ribbon committee studying A's ballpark options.

This will also give the Giants' legal team more time to plan its nuclear attack should Selig's committee recommend that the A's be allowed to invade Giants' territory in San Jose. As the Giants' lawyers will say to MLB, "We got your Moneyball right here, boys."

-- For MLB's new ban on the use of smokeless tobacco during TV interviews. It will be a challenge for some of these guys to get through a two-minute interview without drooling brown slime, but worth it if it encourages young ballplayers to avoid the nasty habit until they're at least 12.

The ban will make the game slightly less disgusting, and could pave the way for a related rule: A five-second limit on cup readjustment. Call it the Pablo Sandoval Rule.

-- For big-league baseball's decision to assist umpires with increased use of instant replay. Or, as they call it in the NFL, instantly-bringing-the-flow-of-the-game-to-a-screaching-halt-with-overanalyzation replay.

-- For baseball's new layers of rules on arbitration and free agency. Now many of us won't have to feel like dunces because we don't understand the system, since nobody on Earth does.

-- For a breakthrough in the NBA labor dispute. Both sides have agreed to reconvene and enter serious discussions about Harry Potter movies.

-- For the 49ers being blue-collar, but not so tough that they can't show their sensitive side by expressing concern over having to cross two time-zones to play a short-week game.

Still, it kind of makes you miss the old days, when players coped with jet lag by staying out all night, flossing their teeth with a pop-top tab, and hitting the old gridiron.

-- For Stanford coach David Shaw lashing out at the BCS computer system because it dissed his football team. It is charmingly naive of Shaw to believe his anger, however justified, will make the slightest difference, because computers don't have ears.

But let's hope Shaw keeps the faith that bad technology cannot be allowed to prevail. It's like the song by the Flaming Lips, "Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots" - "Those evil-natured robots/they're programmed to destroy us/She's gotta be strong to fight them/So she's taking lots of vitamins."

-- For the BCS system. It is the ultimate machine of absolute democracy. In the end, every team gets screwed, even the eventual national champions, whose title is diminished by the indignation of the disgruntled should've-been teams.

-- For baseball's new HGH testing which, if effective, will lead to a new rule: Any ball hit to the outfield grass on the fly is a home run.

-- For my family's traditional Thanksgiving turduckin, which we wrap in a giant anchovy pizza, deep fry, dip in a nacho-cheese fondue trough and smother with low-cal cranberry sauce. Served a la mode, you betcha.

-- For everyone reading this column, on purpose or by accident. May your Thanksgiving start to get better right now.

Tobacco, HGH moves in baseball are only 1st steps

John Shea, Chronicle Columnist 11/23/2011

Barry Bonds broke Hank Aaron's homers record with a circular tin of smokeless tobacco in his right rear pocket, which really wasn't necessary.

He could have stored his stash in the clubhouse or dugout. It wasn't as if he'd step from the batter's box and reach for a dip.

If players are going to fight for their right to chew tobacco - and subject themselves to the consequences - the least they can do is keep the product out of sight of gullible onlookers who think it's cool to act like a ballplayer and stuff a pinch between their cheek and gum.

Baseball officials finally got hip to that and will limit players' use of smokeless tobacco, according to the five-year collective bargaining agreement between players and owners that was announced Tuesday. Players can't be seen with tins in their pockets or, during televised interviews, tobacco in their mouths.

If Bonds were playing today, he'd need to hide his usage.

On the other hand, he'd still be able to use human growth hormone throughout the season without worrying about getting busted. The agreement includes in-season HGH testing but only for probable cause.

Unless Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams embark on a reunion tour and intercept a package of HGH intended for Player X, probable cause is tough to define. The only unannounced random testing will be in spring training and the offseason, which is silly considering someone can begin using HGH regularly on Opening Day.

"It's a mixed bag," said Dr. Gary Wadler, former chairman of World Anti-Doping Agency's prohibited list and now a Hofstra medical school professor. "It's a season of 162 games. It seems to me in-season testing is as important as it is out of season.

"And how do you define probable cause for growth hormone? It's in the eyes of the beholder. There seems to me a gaping hole in the program.

"On the other hand, it is a step forward."

Indeed. That union chief Michael Weiner would agree to any form of blood testing is stunning in the wake of predecessors Donald Fehr and Marvin Miller refusing to budge while playing the invasion-of-privacy card. Weiner has newer science and better testing data on his side.

Maybe the majority of players finally demanded a level playing field, realizing the juicers' distinct physical and financial advantage over non-juicers. Today's ballplayers might be trying to separate themselves from a game of shadows.

That's what we'd like to believe, anyway. Realistically, the policy won't be believable until it includes in-season testing overseen by third-party pros. Commissioner Bud Selig and Weiner said they're open to future in-season testing, though no timetable was set.

The policy will go into effect in spring training, but at first, it'll be more to help determine if blood tests would affect players' energy levels. That would help dictate the next step. Weiner said he heard from scientists that current tests detect HGH in the blood only from 48 to 72 hours, adding he's concerned about testing interfering with competition.

Which Wadler pooh- poohed.

"You've had blood drawn," he said. "Have you suddenly become profoundly weak after taking blood? That's ridiculous. It should have zero impact on your performance."

Like baseball's new tobacco guidelines - anti-tobacco advocates wanted an all-out ban - the HGH testing program isn't nearly enough. But it's a little better than nothing, which is how steroid testing began.

Now we wait for improvements.

HGH tests, restraints on amateur bonuses for MLB

By RONALD BLUM, AP Sports Writer 11/23/2011

Baseball has labor peace while the NBA is stopped and the NFL nearly came to a standstill.

"We've learned," baseball Commissioner Bud Selig said Tuesday after players and owners signed an agreement for a five-year contract running until December 2016. "Nobody back in the '70s, '80s and the early '90s, 1994, would ever believe that we would have 21 years of labor peace."

The agreement makes MLB the first pro major league in North America to conduct blood tests for human growth hormone, allowing it during spring training and future offseasons but for now only studying whether it will be implemented during the regular season.

"MLB and the players union should be applauded for taking the strong step to implement the HGH test at the major league level to protect clean athletes," said Travis Tygart, chief executive officer of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. "This is great progress in MLB's effort to protect the integrity of baseball at every level."

The deal, which must be ratified by both sides and drafted into a formal contract, expands the playoffs from eight to 10 teams by 2013, lessens draft-pick compensation to teams for losing free agents, expands salary arbitration by a few players and for the first time allows teams to trade some draft selections.

It also adds unprecedented restraints on signing bonuses for amateur players coming to the major leagues from high school, college and overseas, perhaps hurting MLB as it competes with the NFL and NBA for multisport talent.

"If I've got a great athlete, why am I going to go to baseball? I'm going to focus on the other sports," said agent Scott Boras, who has negotiated baseball's highest signing bonuses.

Following eight work stoppages from 1972-95, baseball reached its third consecutive agreement without an interruption of play. The agreement was signed three weeks before the current deal was to expire Dec. 11, the second straight time the sides reached a deal early.

Baseball seems to have learned the lessons of the 1994-95 strike, which wiped out the World Series for the first time in nine decades.

"I think our history is more important than what's happening in other sports," said Michael Weiner, who took over from Donald Fehr as union head last year. "It took a while for the owners to appreciate that the union is not only here to stay, but that the union and its members can contribute positively to a discussion about the game — about its economics, about the nature of the competition, about how it's marketed in every way."

Other highlights included: requiring players to play in the All-Star game unless injured or excused; expanding instant replay to include decisions on foul lines and traps, subject to an agreement with umpires; banning smokeless tobacco products during televised interviews by players, managers and coaches; requiring players arrested for DWI to undergo mandatory evaluation; and wearing improved batting helmets manufactured by Rawlings by 2013.

An initial positive test for HGH would result in a 50-game suspension, the same as a first positive urine test for a performance-enhancing substance. HGH testing in the minor leagues started late in the 2010 season.

"It meant a great deal to me personally, and a great deal to our sport," Selig said.

Random testing for HGH will take place during spring training and the offseason, but there is no agreement yet on random testing in-season. There can be testing at any time for cause.

Although the NFL has wanted to start HGH blood tests, its players' union has thus far resisted.

"The agreement to begin testing puts baseball ahead of other American professional sports leagues and is a credit to their leadership," Rep. Henry Waxman said. "It will be important that the testing be extended to the regular season to avoid creating a loophole in the new policy."

The sides will explore in-season testing, but the union wants to make sure it's done in a way that doesn't interfere with players' health and safety. In addition, the number of offseason urine tests will increase gradually from 125 currently to 250 before the 2015 season.

As for the playoffs, there will be an additional two teams that will give baseball 10 of 30 clubs in the postseason. In the NFL, 12 of 32 teams make the playoffs. In the NBA and NHL, 16 of 30 advance.

The wild-card teams in each league — the non-first place teams with the best records — will meet in a one-game playoff, with the winners advancing to the division series. Manfred said a decision on whether the expanded playoffs would start next year likely will be made by the January owners' meeting.

"I think having a second wild-card team is great for the game," said NL MVP Ryan Braun of the Milwaukee Brewers. "I think it adds intrigue, it adds excitement. If you look at what the wild card, the first wild card, has done for baseball over the last few years, it's made games late in the season relevant for everybody."

This agreement also calls for the Houston Astros to switch from the NL Central to the AL West in 2013, leaving each league with three five-team divisions and a new schedule format that's still being determined. It's baseball's first realignment since the Brewers went to the NL after the 1997 season.

Weeks cherishes values instilled by family

By Jane Lee / MLB.com 11/23/2011

OAKLAND -- The Weeks family naturally celebrates Thanksgiving year-round.

Sure, their dinner table may be more crowded on Thursday, covered with more food -- "Gotta have the cornbread," mother Valeria Weeks-McMillian said. "We love the cornbread" -- and more games than the normal day would likely allow time for.

But the acts of thanks, of reflection, of appreciation -- some or all of which are too often relegated to one holiday -- are ongoing, no matter if it's the third Thursday of November or the first or second Tuesday of April.

A conversation with Jemile Weeks, the family's middle child, proves just as much.

The Oakland A's second baseman, one of the game's top rookies in 2011 following his June promotion, takes nothing -- neither his big league status nor any perks that come with it -- for granted.

He talks of the childhood he had in a house of structure, under a roof filled with plenty of love -- the kind of tough love that meant homework and church always came before playtime in the streets.

"I got into my fair share of trouble when I wasn't home at a certain time," Weeks said, laughing.

But, eventually, Jemile always made it home. And the 24-year-old still finds his way there, never forgetting his Florida roots or the people responsible for creating them.

"The offseason time is about being with the family, and Jemile sure relishes that time," said Valeria, who is also mom to daughter, Kaisha, and son, Rickie, Milwaukee's All-Star second baseman. "Baseball fills our hearts with joy for 162 days of the year, but these are the times we look forward to. These are the moments I wait for."

In the winter months, Jemile and Rickie make their offseason homes close to mom, who provides Sunday dinners after church. As a pastor, Valeria introduced her kids to church at a young age, so as to provide them with a "solid foundation."

"It was important for them to be there because it gave them character-building skills, putting God first and everything else second," Rickie Weeks Sr. said. "I think it really helped all of them socially, communicating with people and behaving the right way."

So they went multiple times a week, even if it meant Rickie Sr. sneaking out of service early with his sons in time for a baseball game. As they grew older, both took to the drums in the church musical group -- an exercise Jemile believes aided in the rhythmic and timing skills involved in hitting.

"Certain things were expected of us and certain things just weren't acceptable in our household that might have been next door," Jemile said. "They tried to raise us to a different standard, and we had no choice in the matter."

"We lived on a different schedule -- a good schedule that helped mold us."

But he insists, "When you have that type of guidance to steer you away from those bad influences, it really shapes your future, maybe a lot sooner than the person next to you."

Though baseball didn't mean much to Valeria if schoolwork wasn't done, several of her favorite early memories of Jemile came on the field, where her son -- who stands just 5-foot-8 -- would step to the plate, his opponents automatically coming in from the outfield and infield with little expectation.

"That was always funny to me because I thought, 'They really don't know who this kid is,'" Valeria said. "Whenever they did that, the ball always went over their heads. It never failed. The coaches and the parents on the sidelines, they'd say, 'Wow, look at that little kid go!'"

Even before that time, Rickie Sr. recalls Jemile in his stroller, impatiently waiting for his turn to join his older brother on the field.

"He would try to get himself out of that stroller," Rickie Sr. said. "He was like, 'I gotta get out there and play baseball, dad!'"

"He had all of us throwing the ball to him, with one of those plastic ball and bat sets," Valeria said. "I would have the ball and he'd say, 'Pitch the ball, mama!'"

Said Jemile: "God blessed us with parents that care. Growing up in our house, you just learned how to be appreciative. You're supposed to be appreciative of the little things, so you know how to be appreciative of the bigger things."

There's undoubtedly much to be thankful for in the Weeks household. Jemile calls it a "sweet life" -- even when cornbread's not on the table.

"I always told Jemile, 'Big things come in small packages,'" Valeria said. "I truly believe that. I am so proud of him. I'm proud of him as a man, as my son."

DeJesus, Willingham offered arbitration

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

OAKLAND -- On Wednesday, the A's offered salary arbitration to free-agent outfielders Josh Willingham and David DeJesus, meaning they will receive compensatory Draft picks if they decline the respective offers and sign elsewhere.

The pair has until 9 p.m. PT on Dec. 7 to accept, though both are expected to decline. Willingham, who is one of six big leaguers to be classified as a "modified" Type-A free agent in a one-year arrangement under the new Collective Bargaining Agreement, is being pursued by several teams. DeJesus is also likely to garner plenty of interest as the outfield market thins.

Under the new CBA, a team that signs a modified Type-A free agent, such as Willingham, will not forfeit a Draft pick to sign him. Instead, it will receive compensation in the form of the pick before the signing team's scheduled first-round pick, as well as a supplemental-round selection. The change to the status of those modified free agents is for this offseason only, as a new set of rules will be implemented next year.

Meanwhile, if DeJesus signs elsewhere, the A's will receive a supplemental-round selection.

The A's did not offer arbitration to Hideki Matsui, Coco Crisp or Rich Harden, who represent unranked free agents for whom no compensation applies.

Hosmer headlines Legacy Award recipients

Slugger to net Negro Leagues Baseball Museum's Rookie of Year

By Dick Kaegel / MLB.com

KANSAS CITY -- There will be a hometown flavor when the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum hands out its annual Legacy Awards. First baseman Eric Hosmer of the Royals was named the American League Rookie of the Year.

The awards will be presented in ceremonies at 8 p.m. CT on Saturday, Jan. 28, at the Gem Theater in Kansas City. The event is part of the Buck O'Neil Centennial Celebration in memory of the beloved baseball ambassador who would have been 100 on Nov. 13.

Hosmer and the National League's top rookie, Braves pitcher Craig Kimbrel will receive the Larry Doby Award.

Former Royals outfielder Coco Crisp, with the A's last season, will share the James "Cool Papa" Bell Award as co-leader in AL stolen bases. Another ex-Royal, Kirk Gibson of the D-backs, will be given the C.I. Taylor Award as NL manager of the year, along with AL counterpart Ron Washington of the Rangers.

Former Royals beat writer La Velle E. Neal III, now with the Minneapolis Star Tribune, will receive the Sam Lacy Award as the baseball writer of the year. Kansas City barbecue restaurant owner Ollie Gates will accept the Buck O'Neil Award for outstanding support of the museum.

Lou Brock, who became a Hall of Fame player on the other side of Missouri for the St. Louis Cardinals, was selected for the Jackie Robinson Legacy Award for lifetime achievement. Brock was originally signed by O'Neil for the Cubs.

Other winners announced on Tuesday night:

Oscar Charleston Award for most valuable players: Curtis Granderson, Yankees; Matt Kemp, Dodgers.

Wilber "Bullet" Rogan Award for pitchers of the year: Justin Verlander, Tigers; Clayton Kershaw, Dodgers.

Josh Gibson Award for home run leaders: Jose Bautista, Blue Jays; Kemp.

James "Cool Papa" Bell Award for stolen base leaders: Brett Gardner, Yankees, and Crisp; Michael Bourn, Braves.

Walter "Buck" Leonard Award for batting champions: Miguel Cabrera, Tigers; Jose Reyes, Mets.

Andrew "Rube" Foster Award for executives of the year: Dave Dombrowski, Tigers; Doug Melvin, Brewers.

Hilton Smith Award for relievers of the year: Jose Valverde, Tigers; Kimbrel and John Axford, Brewers.

John Henry "Pop" Lloyd Award for baseball and community leadership: Michael Young, Rangers.

A's offer Josh Willingham arbitration

ESPN.com news services 11/23/2011

OAKLAND, Calif. -- The Oakland Athletics have offered salary arbitration to free agent outfielders Josh Willingham and David DeJesus.

Both players have until Nov. 30 to decide whether to accept the offers. If they decide to sign elsewhere, Oakland would receive draft-pick compensation next June.

Willingham is one of six players who is an exception to baseball's free-agent compensation rules this winter, under the terms of the labor deal signed by MLB and the union on Tuesday.

By offering Willingham arbitration, the A's could receive a high draft pick and a compensation-round pick in next summer's draft if Willingham signs elsewhere. They would pick just ahead of the team signing Willingham, but the team that signed him would not lose a draft pick -- a change from the old rules.

Willingham had career highs of 29 home runs and 98 RBIs in 2011, the most by an A's player since Frank Thomas' 114 in 2006, and likely will have plenty of suitors.

DeJesus batted a career-low .240 with 10 homers and 46 RBIs in 2011.

General manager Billy Beane has acknowledged it could be difficult to sign his own free agents given the team's unsettled ballpark situation. A's owner Lew Wolff wants to move the team to San Jose but is waiting for word from commissioner Bud Selig.

Linking A's stadium with ability to sign players is flawed

Ray Ratto, comcastsportsnet.com

There is nothing particularly new about Billy Beane's interest in the Athletics' stadium issue. He's been telling this one for awhile now, since he has started publicly linking the illusory San Jose stadium to his ability to signing players.

There's also nothing particularly useful about it. Baseball budgets are set by owners, not general managers, so Beane's claim that he cannot make bolder forays into the market has always been true. The owners determine what goes out based on what comes in, and that has always been the case.

The intriguing thing is the claim that the A's lost money last year, which one can only assume does not include the revenue sharing check the A's annually receive from Major League Baseball. And assuming that, we can assume that once again, John Fisher and Lew Wolff didn't actually lose real money.

So let's remove that as the reason for the A's new P.R. push for stadium action, and that they are becoming more strident in their impatience for a report from the largely mythical blue ribbon panel studying the San Jose market. Why this fiction continues is a marvel of modern mythmaking, as the issue isn't about San Jose as a market.

The issues are in fact these:

- Do the A's have the money to do this? Wolff says yes, but as there is no independent way to know, there is no reason to believe or disbelieve him. There is no shovel in the ground, and that is sufficient information.
- Do the Giants have a way to prevent the A's from moving? No. They can lose territorial rights with a simple owners' vote, and they cannot sue Major League Baseball if the vote goes against them. So the Giants have no leverage whatsoever. None. At all.
- Does baseball want to screw the Giants? Sort of, yes. What Bud Selig is actually trying to do is what he does best – back-channel everything so he can find a dollar amount that the A's would be willing to grease the Giants with to buy their acquiescence and silence. The A's are standing with their original offer of nothing, and the Giants are insisting that no amount of money actually exists because their long-term plan has always been for the A's to be nowhere near them.

And no blue-ribbon panel can decide any of those issues.

This is what it always has been – an exercise in politics and arm-twisting, with Selig trying to find the middle ground that makes everyone a little bit unhappy but not so unhappy that they'll start bitching out loud.

Bud likes peace and quiet that way.

This is why all the screeching about territorial rights has always been nonsense, and why the blue ribbon committee has been a joke, and why every assumption based on either of those two things is erroneous and even silly on its face.

What's actually important to know is this:

MLB can live with the status quo, right up until the day that Fisher and Wolff decide to sell, or simply get out. There are those who believe the Dodger settlement issues are tied to the A's because Wolff and perhaps even Beane are casting covetous eyes southward, though that seems something of a stretch at this point.

If the Dodgers and A's are not linked that way, then the urgency to solve the issue isn't baseball's but Fisher's and Wolff's. And in baseball like every other sport, there are owners with throw-weight within the organization and owners without throw-weight. They are among the withouts, and so, frankly, are the Giants' group. They're just guys fighting over a piece of property, and neither side has the leverage to bully the other one aside.

And Billy Beane's role? He's largely involved at ownership's behest now to put a public face on this otherwise faceless issue, as in, "We wanted to keep Gio Gonzalez but Bud's been mean to us."

Yeah, that'll work. One, Bud barely cares about Gio Gonzalez, and two, this isn't about baseball. This is about a haggle over hush money traveling westbound on the Bay Bridge, pure and simple, and the political issues involved in either making that happen or ignoring it altogether.

And you won't be seeing any press conferences about that.

Labor deal has revenue-sharing provision for A's

Janie McCauley, AP Baseball Writer 11/22/2011

OAKLAND, Calif. -- A provision in baseball's new labor deal allows the Oakland Athletics to continue receiving revenue sharing in 2016 and beyond if the club's ballpark situation remains unsettled.

Teams in the largest 15 markets will lose all of their revenue sharing in 2016, except for the low-budget A's if they are unable to build the new ballpark owner Lew Wolff is busy planning for, in San Jose or elsewhere. Wolff certainly hopes it doesn't come to his team still needing revenue sharing in five years.

"The only reason there's a cut out for us is we don't have a proper venue to attract revenue, even though we're in a large market," Wolff said by phone Tuesday night. "We're hoping to have a competitive venue so we can earn revenue like all the other teams. I think that was a very nice thing, but we'd rather not receive revenue sharing."

The San Francisco Giants currently hold the territorial rights to San Jose and technology-rich Silicon Valley in Santa Clara County, some 40 miles south of the A's current home in the rundown Oakland Coliseum. The A's share the stadium with the NFL's Oakland Raiders.

Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig appointed a committee in March 2009 to evaluate the issue facing the Bay Area teams, yet he has provided no timetable for when he might announce a decision. Wolff and general manager Billy Beane have said they expect to hear something soon.

"I'll let the process run its course as directed by the commissioner and the best course is to be patient," Wolff said. "No dates that I know of."

Wolff - who declined to confirm whether he had recently met with Selig on this issue - insists it would "be good for all of baseball" if Oakland could build a new ballpark and thrive.

Thus far it appears Selig doesn't want to make a decision that would anger the A's or Giants - though the revenue-sharing section of the new CBA signals he is at least looking out for Wolff, his old fraternity brother at Wisconsin.

"It's looking out for the situation we have with a two-team market," Wolff said.

Both teams from New York, Los Angeles and Chicago along with Atlanta, Boston, Houston, Oakland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Texas, Toronto and Washington are set to gradually become ineligible to receive revenue-sharing funds. The system calls for the clubs to lose 25 percent of revenue-sharing proceeds in 2013, 50 percent in 2014, 75 percent in 2015 and all revenue sharing in 2016.

In 2011, the A's (74-88) went a fifth straight year without a winning record or playoff berth since being swept in the 2006 AL championship series by Detroit. Beane has said it's hard to plan his strategy for signing free agents this winter until he has a resolution to the ballpark situation.

Major League Baseball hasn't provided a timeline for an announcement - if there is one to make at all - and Selig has asked the two clubs not to publicly debate the issue.